

Children, Gender and School Curricula in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The present study investigates the effect of gender representation in Saudi Arabian school curricula on children's value systems and social character. In particular, the study examines gender distribution in first-grade school textbooks in Saudi Arabia where schooling, and education at large, is single-sex throughout. The data for the study is constituted by six textbooks prescribed for the first school semester at boys' and girls' schools. The study attempts a content analysis of the texts and illustrations in these textbooks in order to examine the representation, indeed construction, for the children of society and the stereotypical social roles of its members. Analysis reveals a gendered representation. Women suffer low visual and verbal visibility, and are almost completely denied occupations. Moreover, social activity is segregated by gender, with women appearing mostly in indoor activities and men in outdoor activities. The paper concludes by revisiting these findings against the backdrop of the idiosyncratic religious and cultural character of the Saudi society in which gender differences are normalized.

Keywords: gender representation, school textbooks, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Research Problem

One theory that explains how children develop personal identity and perception of the world dates back to 1690—John Locke's theory of the mind. The theory postulates that children are born "blank slates" into the world with no prior script and that their knowledge of the world is determined by experience derived from sense perception (Woolhouse, 2004). Children at a young age are free from any prejudices and predispositions and the character they develop as they grow up is the result of external factors, familial and societal, exerting influence on the child.

An important formative factor is education, and education at early age is even more determinative. Early education significantly contributes to a child's development of ideals and formation of social cognition. At this age, the child is learning what is right and wrong, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, and what should and what should not be. Part of this education takes place by the parents at home but most of it happens at school.

School as an institution serves as an agent for the dissemination and reproduction of hegemonic ideologies (Gramsci, 1994). These ideologies may be explicitly taught by the teachers but more often are implicitly passed in instructional materials. In this regard, textbooks play a significant role in the construction of social identity. They do not merely impart information about the world; they serve to condition the students' attitudes and outlook on the world. Cultural values and social norms inculcated at school could become not only naturalized but also institutionalized as prescriptive norms of behavior.

One ideology that permeates school life relates to gender. By the time they join school, children have already learned to categorize themselves and people around them as either male or female, have also learnt to associate social patterns of power and social expectations with each gender. Prior, mainstream understanding of gender roles inculcated outside school roles may be celebrated, reaffirmed or challenged at school, and the child's perception and outlook adapted accordingly.

A common site for the dissemination of hegemonic cultural and social value, and more specifically ideologies about gender, is the school textbook. Textbooks "educate" children on the "right" value system and on how

society is organized. In this sense, they directly contribute to “how children understand what is expected of women and men and shape how they think of their place in the social structure” (McCabe, Emily, Liz, Bernice, & Daniel, 2011, p. 199). Textbooks, especially at school entry level, condition the learners’ evaluation of and attitude to participation in social activities, and constant exposure to these value systems in the textbooks reinforces the propagated patterns of socialization and gender.

The selection of textbooks, therefore, should be a very careful decision and the representation of content in language and visuals therein needs to be continually subjected to revision for conformity with the value systems in the specific and larger social contexts in which children live. Consistent projection of men performing social activities outside the house and consistent projection of women confined to household work, for example, would drive the children into believing that men have no business to do at home and that women do not belong outside home. In some other textbooks women may disappear altogether. Such textbook decisions dictate for the children gender schemas. These schemas become a gender identity that translates into behavior and a subsequent social character that champions, and dictates, these value systems.

These textbook decisions and the concomitant effects on children’s character have motivated scholars around the world to investigate sexism in educational materials. These studies have exposed different patterns of gender representation and have related these patterns to social norms and values in the contexts where children are living. The studies have also made recommendations to syllabus designers and executors in order to arrive at a more balanced gender personality. The present study extends this research trend by investigating gender representation in first grade school textbooks in Saudi Arabia, a little-researched context. But before the analysis or even the review of relevant studies, we need to briefly outline the gender and education scene in Saudi Arabia in order to contextualize the study.

1.2 Gender and Education in KSA

Education in Saudi Arabia has a long history. The first public school was established in 1930, two years before the founding of present-day Saudi Arabia (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). For the first thirty years, however, only male students were enrolled in schools. Girls did not go to school. In fact, they were not allowed to go to school.

In 1960, female students were enrolled in school for the first time, albeit segregated in female-only schools. Girls’ schools were supervised by the Department of Religious Guidance, and later the General Presidency for Girls’ Education, in order to “ensure that women’s education did not deviate from the original purpose of female education, which was to make women good wives and mothers, and to prepare them for “acceptable” jobs such as teaching and nursing that were believed to suit their nature” (Hamdan, 2005, p. 44). It was only in 2002 that girls’ education moved under the Ministry of Education.

Public education in Saudi Arabia divides into three stages: primary (1st to 6th grade), intermediate (7th to 9th grade) and secondary (10th to 12th grade). The stages of schooling for both boys and girls’ schools are the same, and so are the educational facilities and syllabi, albeit for “small differences to meet the needs of each gender” (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015).

Gender differences are normalized in the Saudi Arabian culture, and this is reflected in the schooling system and in the “curriculum content at all school ages for both boys and girls” (Hamdan, 2005, p. 45). This normalization is attributed to traditional and cultural values grounded in religious thought. In the Saudi patriarchal and conservative culture, men are the bread-winners, the “supporters of the family” and the Saudi religion courses teach “women’s rights as mothers and wives, in inheritance, marriage, divorce, husband and wife’s duties, child custody and child support, foster children, hijab, obedience and so on” (Al-Jarf, 2006, p. 312). In this construction, the role of women is “basic to maintaining the structure of the family and therefore of society (Alireza, 1987). And in the public sphere, they are always subordinated to men” (Hamdan, 2005).

It is against the backcloth of this cultural and religious character that educational policy-making and materials development operate in Saudi Arabia. Oyaid (2009) asserts that “in accordance with the Islamic law”, boys and girls’ education, is “strictly segregated at all levels in terms of school buildings and teaching staff” (p. 17). And at school, religion takes up three to five courses every semester, depending on the stage of education. These are Qur’an recitation, Qur’an commentary (Tafseer), Prophetic sayings (Hadith), Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), and monotheism (Tawheed). These courses are, of course, outnumbered by the other “secular” courses, but it remains to be seen, partly in this paper, how the content of all courses on the school curriculum faithfully reflects this “conservative and religious” ideology of the Saudi society (Oyaid, 2009, p. 165).

2. Previous Studies

Research in this area was set off in America by the 1971 policy statement of the National Council of Teachers of

English, which encouraged the use of non-sexist language in school textbooks (Sakita, 1995), and by the 1972 Education Amendment Act, which made illegal gender discrimination in American schools (Yanowitz & Weathers, 2004). ESL material in the United States, and all beyond, has ever since continually been researched for gender representation and examined for gender stereotyping in both texts and illustrations.

Early attempts at gender analysis in educational material in the United States reveal male dominance in terms of visibility and activity (Graham, 1975; Nilsen, 1977; Hoomes, 1978).

The seminal analysis of sexism in ESL material, however, is Hartman & Judd (1978). The study “explores the treatment of women” in sixteen ESL textbooks published over twelve years and reveals that “women are often less invisible than men”, that women are “often placed in stereotypical roles” and that illustrations in the books “serve to reinforce the biased linguistic patterns” (p. 383). The study makes a number of recommendations in order to “reduce the bias now present in the portrayal of women in ESL materials” (p. 383).

Research continues to analyze ESL material to ascertain endorsement of Hartman and Judd’s recommendations. Porreca (1984) examines fifteen ESL textbooks for gender bias using a more systematic and quantitative analytical framework. The study analyzes nouns, adjectives, generic constructions and investigates sexism along the categories of firstness (precedence of male or female over the other), occupational roles, omission and visibility in text and illustration. Porreca remarks that “there is evidence that five years after the Hartman and Judd study, sexism continues to flourish in ESL materials” (p. 718). And the study concludes that

Although females comprise slightly over half the population of the United States, they are depicted or mentioned only half as often as males in both text and illustrations. Male firstness is three times as prevalent as female firstness... Women are far less visible than men in occupational roles. For every working woman appearing in the text, there are six male workers. For every woman worker shown in an illustration, five more illustrations depict men at their jobs. (p.719)

Interestingly, the majority of the textbooks analyzed by Porreca as well as by Hartman and Judd are authored by women. Nagatomo (2010) notes that “[o]f the 27 authors in the 16 textbooks analyzed by Hartman and Judd, 59% were women, and out of the 29 authors in the 15 textbooks analyzed by Porreca, 62% were women” (p. 54).

Research interest in sexism in textbooks soon found its way to other countries. In Japan, studies have examined gender representation and stereotyping in dictionaries (Osugi, Sadakane, Shimagouchi, & Takahashi, 1990) and in high school textbooks (Kanemaru, 1998) and conclude that females are underrepresented and projected in traditional gender roles. More recently, however, Nagatomo (2010) analyzes gender balance of the characters in Conversation Topics for Japanese Students and reveals that females were more visible and more active than men.

In Australia, Lee & Collins (2010) compares patterns of gender representation in twenty English language textbooks published in Australia and Hong Kong. The study concludes that the Australian and Hong Kong textbooks both reinforce traditional gendered role in texts and illustrations. Women are presented as “weaker and more passive” and occupying “a more limited range of social roles” (p. 121).

In Iran, Bahman & Rahimi (2010) examines gender bias in three volumes of English textbooks taught in high schools in Iran and reveals “a big gender gap between the portrayal of females and males” (p. 277). Men dominate the textbooks; they appear more and appear first in the instructions, exercises and sentences. The textbooks also exhibit a tendency to use male-generics to refer to both sexes.

Similar findings are reported by Amini & Birjandi (2012). The study examines gender bias in two Iranian high school textbooks and concludes that “sexism is still vividly practiced in Iranian EFL materials” (p. 138). Females suffer low visibility in both texts and illustrations and are mainly illustrated in the traditional stereotypical social roles of teacher and housewife. Men, in contrast, are “overrepresented both linguistically and visually in frequency and order of occurrence, occupation, stereotypical activities, and the linguistic manifestation of masculine generic referent” (p. 139).

And more recently, Esmaeili & Arabmofrad (2015) employs Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate the linguistic representation of male and female social actors in Family and Friends 4, 5 and 6. Findings reveal that although traditional stereotypes of female are avoided, the textbooks still exhibit a “sexist attitude”. Female suffer from lower visibility and activity than males.

Closer to our research context, Shteiwi (2003) examined gender representation in ninety-six elementary textbooks used in Jordan. Findings indicate that males dominate 65% of the social roles in the textbooks and 93% excluding the family-related social roles, and that females are projected in traditional roles commonly assigned to women in Jordanian society. And eleven years later, the gender situation in educational material in Jordan has not changed much. Ootom (2014) examines gender distribution in the Arabic Language textbook prescribed for

primary second grade in Jordanian schools. The study reports that men dominate the texts and talks. Women are still projected in the traditional social roles of mother, daughter and student, while men enjoy a wider spectrum of social professions.

Elkholy (2014) investigates gender representation in EFL textbooks used in primary and preparatory stages in both public and private schools in Egypt, and reports similar findings. Analysis reveals “gender imbalance as males were overrepresented in most of the categories while females were stereotypically depicted and marginalized”. In the textbooks, men are “shown as more powerful and more dominant than women who were looked down upon and were illustrated as inferior to men”. Elkholy remarks that this “under representation of women is considered a reflection of the inequality between men and women that continues to thrive in the Egyptian society”.

Tahan (2015) investigates gender representation in school EFL textbooks in the UAE. The study randomly samples a unit each from the textbooks prescribed for grades 1 through 12, and analyzes them along the categories of illustrations, visibility in texts, topic domination, occupations, grammatical functions (the role of actor), character traits, character activities and generic masculine. The study reports that its findings are “parallel to many previous studies” (p. 46). Males outnumber females along the seven examined categories. And Tahan concludes that EFL school textbooks in the UAE contain gender biased materials and stereotyped impressions and recommends a thorough evaluation for gender inequity prior to publication and dissemination in schools.

In Qatar, however, the gender situation in textbooks is not the same. Yasin et al. (2012) examines twenty-four Mathematics textbooks of primary independent schools in Qatar (grades 1-6) for gender representation. Some of these textbooks are published by foreigners and some published in Qatar. These books, selected from four from boys’ schools and one girls’ school, generate a corpus of 502,526 words. Analysis of the corpus reveal that “males are more visible than females in imported texts” and that “in the Qatari published textbooks, females are more visible and dominant than males” (p. 53). The differences are not statistically significant but reveal “a positive move to have textbooks that are more gender balanced” (p. 66).

What is the gender representation situation like in Saudi Arabian school textbooks? There has, understandably, been little research in this area. Female students were first formally enrolled into education only in 1960 and amidst strong opposition (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015), and the first textbook including photos of actual women, albeit veiled, was first introduced as late as 2002 (Owens, 2012). The present study is therefore an investigation into a little studied subject, and the findings are expected to trigger an interesting body of work on the topic.

3. The Present Study

The present study is an extension of the research trend to examine sexism in language textbooks, in general, and in school textbooks, more specifically. The contribution this study makes is the attention to first-grade school textbooks in Saudi Arabia—a little-research context, and the concern with the ideological manipulation by adults of children’s outlook on society through their first encounter with textbooks at school.

3.1 Objectives

The study attempts an analysis of gender representation in first grade school textbooks in Saudi Arabia in order to answer the following questions:

- 1) How are women represented in the texts and illustrations in the textbooks?
- 2) How are men represented in the texts and illustrations in the textbooks?
- 3) Are the textbooks written in gendered language?
- 4) Do the textbooks enforce or challenge the stereotypical gender roles prevalent in the Saudi Arabian society?

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Data

The data for this study consists of the textbooks prescribed for first grade male and female students at Saudi Arabian public schools in the year 2015-16. The total number of courses offered each semester is six and each course has a student and activity book, totaling 24 textbooks overall. For considerations of space and relevance to the study objectives, the study samples the first semester textbooks, which total 12. The subjects are: Arabic, Math, Science, Islamic Jurisprudence, Tawheed (Monotheism), and Art Education. The activity book contains little text and illustration and is comprised mainly of exercises on the material presented in the student books. For this reason, the activity books are excluded from the analysis, and the data of the study is constituted only by the six student textbooks.

The selection of the data is constrained by the study objectives. The selection of the first semester textbooks is driven by the consideration that they offer an insight into how educators, or policy makers responsible for textbook development at the Saudi Ministry of Education, introduce children into the world. These textbooks present, indeed construct, for children the social world, its participants, and the social roles designated for each gender.

3.2.2 Design

The study is descriptive in nature. It employs qualitative methods for the investigation of gender representation across the reading passages, illustrations, and conversations in the six textbooks. Categories of analysis include visibility, firstness, occupations, activities, and stereotyping.

3.2.3 Procedure

In order to describe the representation of gender, tallies were made of the frequency of appearance of each gender in the illustrations, the frequency of appearance of each gender in the texts, the firstness of appearance of each gender in the illustrations, the firstness of appearance of the each gender in the texts, the number of conversational turns of each gender, the number of occupational roles filled in by each gender, the type of occupational roles and activities assigned to each gender, and the number of gender-specific and gender-neutral nouns, pronouns and adverbs across the six texts.

4. Findings

4.1 Visibility

The parameter of visibility refers to the relative number of male and female appearances or omissions. The majority of studies on sexism in educational material, both in the East and the West, have revealed gender imbalance, with men predominantly outnumbering women in both texts and illustrations.

The sample at hand exhibits a similar pattern. The total number of appearances in the illustrations in the six textbooks is 562, with men constituting 72.95% and women 27.05% (Table 1 shows the variation of the distribution of these appearances across the six textbooks). Analysis reveals interesting findings. Only four of the 562 appearances features human characters. The Arabic textbook, which has the most number of illustrations, has 449 appearances only two of which are human characters—indeed male characters. The other textbook that features human characters is the Math textbook, which has two female characters. The remaining illustrations in these two and the other four textbooks feature only cartoon characters. Besides, the two religion textbooks have no female characters. And the science textbook has an equal representation of gender, with male and female cartoon characters appearing 19 times each.

Table 1. Visibility in illustrations

	Tawheed No (%)	Jurisprudence No (%)	Arabic No (%)	Math No (%)	Science No (%)	Art Education No (%)	Total No (%)
Male	15(100)	42(100)	326(72.61)	00(00)	19(50)	08(57.14)	410(72.95)
Female	00(00)	00(00)	123(27.39)	04(100)	19(50)	06(42.86)	152(27.05)
Total	15(100)	42(100)	449(100)	04(100)	38(100)	14(100)	562 (100)

Another dimension to visual visibility is indicated by the number of times gender-specific lexical items appear in the texts. The gendered nouns, pronouns and verbs across the six books have been tallied, with interesting findings. The total number of gendered lexical items is 2006, which constitutes 61.69% of the total number of lexical items examined. There are more gendered than gender-neutral lexical items in the data. The ratio of gender-specific to gender-neutral nouns is 16.7:1, the ratio of gender-specific to gender-neutral pronouns is 1.6:1, and the ratio of gender-specific to gender-neutral verbs is almost 1:1. And in terms of percentages, 94.35% of the nouns are gender-specific, 61.24% of the pronouns are gender-specific, and 48.33% of the verbs are gender-specific. These figures break down across the data as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Verbal visibility (texts)

		Tawheed	Jurisprudence	Arabic	Math	Science	Art Education	Total
		No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
Male	Nouns	15(75)	83(76.85)	142(65.14)	428(98.62)	18(78.26)	43(52.44)	729(82.37)
	Pronouns	12(100)	47(79.66)	20(30.30)	29(93.55)	00(00)	06(20.00)	114(54.55)
	Verbs	07(20.59)	40(25.48)	46(09.29)	849(85.58)	06(01.73)	50(18.12)	998(46.25)
Female	Nouns	00(00)	07(06.48)	63(28.90)	06(01.38)	00(00)	30(36.59)	106(11.98)
	Pronouns	00(00)	03(05.09)	05(07.58)	00(00)	00(00)	06(20.00)	14(06.70)
	Verbs	00(00)	00(00)	29(05.86)	00(00)	00(00)	16(05.79)	45(02.08)
Neutral	Nouns	05(25)	18(16.67)	13(05.96)	00(00)	05(21.74)	09(10.97)	50(05.65)
	Pronouns	00(00)	09(15.25)	41(62.12)	02(06.45)	11(100)	18(60.00)	81(38.75)
	Verbs	27(79.41)	117(74.52)	420(84.85)	143(14.42)	341(98.27)	210(76.09)	1115(51.67)

There is also another dimension to verbal visibility, viz., the number of times the characters speak in the texts. Out of a total number of 136 speaking occasions across the six textbooks, the male characters speak 110 times (80.88%) and the female characters 26 times (19.12%). These figures break down as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Verbal visibility (conversations)

		Tawheed	Jurisprudence	Arabic	Math	Science	Art Education	Total
		No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
Male		17(100)	32(100)	61(72.62)	00(00)	00(00)	00(00)	110(80.88)
Female		00(00)	00(00)	23(27.38)	03(100)	00(00)	00(00)	26(19.12)
Total		17(100)	32(100)	84(100.00)	03(100)	00(00)	00(00)	136(100)

4.2 Firstness

The second aspect of gender (im)balance is “the order of mention, termed firstness” (Porreca, 1984, p. 706). The term refers to the ordering of gender-specific nouns or pronouns when they come together in text, or the ordering of turns by the gender of the speaker in conversation.

Only two of the textbooks under analysis have texts that exhibit patterns of firstness. In the Arabic textbook, there are twelve such expressions, ten of which place males before females (83.33%) and only two expressions put females first (16.67%). And in the Math textbook, there are six such expressions all of which place males first (100%). Such an arrangement, according to Hartman and Judd “reinforces the second-place status of women and could, with only a little effort, be avoided by mixing the order” (1978, p. 390).

Like with texts, so with conversations. Only three textbooks have conversations. The Tawheed textbook has an adjacency pair and two short male-to-male conversations with one turn to every interlocutor. The Jurisprudence textbook also has two male-to-male conversations with one turn to every interlocutor. And the Arabic textbook has only one adjacency pair. It is mixed-gender and initiated by the female.

4.3 Gender Roles

The third parameter in the investigation of gender bias in the selected school textbooks is the distribution of gender roles. These include the occupational roles and activities associated with a specific gender. Research on educational material has uncovered a persistent distributional pattern where men have consistently enjoyed higher profile occupations and women lower status occupations (Litosseliti, 2006; Ullah & Skelton, 2013; Hall, 2014).

Analysis of illustrations in the present study reveals an even more marked pattern. Seven occupational roles are distributed thirteen times across the sample, and they are all occupied by men. Men are projected as engineers, teachers, sellers, carpenters, wool spinners, fire fighters, and farmers. Women, on the other hand, do not occupy any profession in the illustrations (Table 4).

The distribution of activities, however, presents a different pattern. Women are projected in family gatherings and in indoor and outdoor activities. The activity they practice the most, however, is doing household work, followed by studying at home or at school. And like in occupational roles, there are activities that are male-only. These include driving, riding bikes, experimenting, and fishing (Table 5).

Table 4. Occupations in illustrations

	Engineer No (%)	Teacher No (%)	Salesperson No (%)	Carpenter No (%)	Whool Spinner No (%)	Fire-fighter No (%)	Farmer No (%)	Total No (%)
Male	01(100)	04(100)	02(100)	01(100)	01(100)	01(100)	03(100)	13(100)
Female	00(00)	00(100)	00(00)	00(00)	00(00)	00(00)	00(100)	00(00)
Total	01(100)	04(100)	02(100)	01(100)	01(100)	01(100)	03(100)	13(100)

Table 5. Activities in illustrations

Activity	Male No (%)	Female No (%)
Driving	03(100)	00(00)
Riding a bike	03(100)	00(00)
Studying	25(67.57)	12(32.43)
Outdoor activity	40(81.63)	09(18.37)
Family gathering	12(63.16)	07(36.84)
Playing indoors	02(40)	03(60)
Home activity	14(70)	06(30)
Praying	06(75)	02(25)
Working at home	07(33.33)	14(66.67)
Experimenting	02(100)	00(00)
Fishing	02(100)	00(00)
Sewing	00(00)	06(100)
Total	116(66.29)	59(33.71)

5. Conclusion

School textbooks are central to the formation of cultural and social values for children, especially for primary school children. At this early age, children's schemata about the world, in general, and about gender, in particular, are building. The terms in which the textbooks categorize people and assign roles and activities based on gender are likely to indoctrinate hegemonic ideologies about gender that eventually convert into behavioral patterns that define the social code. The under representation of women in textbooks, for example, "may have a negative impact on the self-esteem, motivation and ambitions of students who are exposed to these textbooks on daily basis" (Tahan, 2015, p. 48).

The present study has examined gender representation in first grade school textbooks in government schools in Saudi Arabia. Analysis of the six textbooks has revealed a gendered representation. Women are less visible than men in both illustrations and texts. In illustrations, women constitute 27.05% of the total character visibility (a ratio of 1: 2.7 in favor of men), while in texts they constitute only 8.96% (a ratio of 1: 11.15 in favor of men). Women also almost always (83.33%) come after men in expressions where both genders are referred to. And they are also almost silenced. They only speak less than 20% of the total number of utterances in the textbooks.

Besides, occupations in all the six textbooks are male-only. Men occupy all the jobs, even the one stereotypically associated with women—teaching. Men work as sellers, carpenters, wool spinners, fire fighters, farmers, and, of course, teachers. Female employment is shown to be socially undesirable.

Social activity is also segregated by gender. Even though females participate in outdoor activities (15.25%), they appear mostly in indoor activity (84.75%). All the activities performed by females are also performed by males, except sewing. It is a female-specific activity. There are also male-specific activities in the textbooks. These are always out-door activities, namely, driving, riding bikes, experimenting and fishing.

It may be concluded, therefore, that the examined school textbooks propagate the social desirability for women to have an education and the social undesirability for them to have an occupation. They also propagate the view that women are more suited to domestic, indoor activity and men to more physically demanding outdoor activity. In this way, the textbooks condition male and female students' social character and prompt them to more "patriarchal" behavioral patterns.

6. Recommendations

According to the Saudi Central Department of Statistics and Information, Saudi women account for 51% of college graduates but occupy only 13% of private and public positions available to Saudi nationals. However, Saudi women are enjoying increasing mobility and visibility. They serve on boards of chambers of commerce,

serve as deputy ministers, lawyers, bank managers (in female-only banks), school principals (in female-only schools), doctors, nurses and of course teachers. In 2015 they were allowed to vote and stand as candidates in the municipal elections, and won 20 seats. The present study recommends that this changing social landscape be reflected in the texts and illustration in the school textbooks.

On the other hand, gender differences are normalized in Saudi Arabia. Sex segregation is accepted popularly and is not regarded as implying a lesser social status or lesser social recognition. In fact, this segregation is often valued by both men and women because it has generated male-only and female-only jobs, giving both genders a professional advantage. The present study recommends that this social conviction continue to be reflected in both the texts and illustrations in the school textbooks. After all, school is expected to reaffirm the traditional, social, cultural and religious values of the society.

7. Further Research

Further research on textbooks for higher school grades using the same analytic parameters would lead to more accurate conclusions about gender representation in Saudi Arabian school textbooks. The sample in this study is the first grade textbooks. Because of the introductory nature of the textbooks and the age group they target, these textbooks contain more picture than text and conversation. The conclusions arrived at in this study could be confirmed or invalidated if analysis extends to other textbooks that contain more talk, text and dialog.

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